Achievement of the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) cannot be accomplished without addressing gender inequalities in health, including those impacting on reproductive health. MDG 5, “Improving maternal health”, has the explicit target of ensuring reproductive health for all women. Progress towards MDG 5 is monitored through achievement of two targets: reduce maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015; and achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health care.

The WHO Regional Office programme on Gender in Health and Development focuses on ways that gender as a social construct affects the health of both men and women. Gender inequality has a higher toll on women’s health because their relatively lower status across cultures has restricted their access to resources for health, including education, health information and employment.

The necessity to improve reproductive health has received increasing priority throughout the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. Recognizing the importance of reproductive health research as an area of strategic priority for policy formulation and programme development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, the Regional Office has developed a directory for reproductive health research conducted in the Region since 1990. It aims to facilitate exchange of research-related experience in the field of reproductive health between and within countries. In addition, it is expected to further support utilization of data in the development and implementation of reproductive health programmes.

A conference entitled “Women Deliver 2010” will be held in Washington DC on 7–9 June 2010. The theme is: “Delivering solutions for girls and women”, with the focus on political, economic, social/cultural, and technological solutions. The main objective of the conference is to highlight the importance of investing in women to achieve the MDGs through political, economic, sociocultural and technological solutions.

“Women Deliver 2010” is jointly supported by WHO and other UN agencies, bilateral donors and foundations, and will bring together experts and scholars in maternal health and mortality as well as in human rights, gender, HIV/AIDS, education, micro-enterprise, labour and sexual and reproductive health, including family planning. The conference aims to move the dialogue to the global arena with two messages: the MDGs will not be achieved without investing in women and there is just enough time, if we commit funding now, to achieve MDG5 by 2015.